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# THE SCHOOL REVIEW

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## OUTLOOK NOTES

A FAVORITE form of superstition has always associated itself with certain mystic numbers, the unlucky thirteen, the lucky seven, the dubious nine, and the like. There are signs on the horizon that secondary education has found something fatally fascinating about the number four. Every student must carry on four studies together, each study must come four times a week, and the course must be four years in length. Three used to be the number; how it has changed to four would be an interesting study, but changed it has for weal or woe. But if we ask, Why should the high-school or academy course consist of years four and no more? the answer is a little far to seek. To be sure, there are certain conventional, universally accepted reasons, of which the chief are that four years are all the children and the public will stand on top of an eight-year elementary course, and that four years are required to fit for college. Neither of these answers touches the vital elements of the question. Worst of all, they accept as inevitable, unquestionable, and unalterable the limitations set upon the secondary school by the institutions above and below. As if the secondary school was a mere stop-gap, or a bridge, with toll houses at both ends, over which the favored few might pass!

Such a feeble conception of the secondary school does at this present writing undoubtedly reign in high places, but it

should be challenged at every turn. If the secondary school has not a special place and function of its own, regardless of what precedes or what follows, then is its future indeed hopeless. There is nothing in the law of nature, nor, so far as we are aware, is there anything in revelation, that bears upon the division of time between the different grades of school work, giving eight years to the primary and grammar school, four years to the high school, four years to the college, and the rest, if there is anything left, to the university. The existing condition is an evolutionary product of heredity and environment, no doubt, but it is nearly the hour appointed for discussing it in the light of reason and, more particularly, of plain common sense.

Boys and girls grow up; trees grow up; possibly by analogy from these and other instances we get the impression that "up" is the only way to grow, that expansion is possible in only one direction. The few sporadic attempts made so far to extend the high-school course have aimed, with scarcely an exception, at a higher high school. Are not all such undertakings somewhat like the way in which children restore the balance of a swaying pile of blocks by putting on another block or two, so placed, with reference to the center, as to restore for a moment the equilibrium of the whole? Before we build higher let us build lower. Perhaps the secondary school is destined to grow both up and down, as some think, so that we may have in the United States the counterpart of the German gymnasium. If so, what is the first step to be, up or down? To add two years at the top, for the benefit of the few, or to add two years at the bottom, for the benefit of a great many? To solve the difficulties attendant upon the introduction of Latin, algebra, French, and German in the seventh and eighth grades—difficulties that exist mainly because of untrained teachers, different methods, different control and ideals—by transferring the seventh and eighth grades to the high school, or to add new difficulties by beginning college work, leaving all the old troubles to plague

**GROWTH AN  
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and vex as before? I should answer unhesitatingly that the general steps of progress from a four to an eight-year secondary course should be: (1) add the eighth grade to the high school; (2) add the seventh grade (and, where possible, these two steps should be combined in one); (3) add an advanced year; (4) add another advanced year. The reasons for the last two steps, entirely different, as I conceive them, from those for the first two, will not here be considered.

LITTLE more than hints can now be given of the advantages of incorporating the two higher grammar grades in the high school.

**WHY ADD  
SEVENTH AND  
EIGHTH  
GRADES?**

From these grades pupils drop out in large numbers, boys especially, who might be held by high-school methods and material. Though theoretically the grammar grades end and high school begins at present with the beginning of adolescence, practically that is scarcely the case; and if this great change in nature does give the natural starting point for a different sort of education from that given to the child, then in the majority of cases the new education should begin with the beginning of the seventh grade. The grammar-school course has been enriched, but it has not been shortened, in answer to the cry of the reformers. In many schools the two higher grades are neither fish, flesh, fowl, nor good red herring, but a sad mess of studies that belong in a high-school course, studies that belong in a grammar course, studies that perhaps do not belong at all. The step that has not been taken in the grammar school is the leaving out of parts that were and are useless, or worse than useless, in the individual subjects, without leaving out the subjects as a whole. It is felt, too, that the student must keep his hold on every subject fairly fresh until the time of leaving school, and so anything once taken up has never been dropped entirely, but has been carried on along with the new studies that have been added. The examination for admission to the high school may be partly responsible for this state of affairs. Anyhow, the children want somebody to help them let go. The teachers in the grammar schools are not always fitted to teach Latin, French, algebra, and the like. If

these subjects are to go into the grammar grades, they ought to be taught just a little better there than in the high schools, not a good deal worse. It is not possible to get teachers with college educations into the grammar schools; but suppose we grant that the teaching is just as good in one school as another, still it remains true that the scholar must change teachers, change methods, and change schools just as he gets nicely started on his new line of work. The interests of the pupils—the only interests worth serious consideration in school organization—demand that the first extension of the secondary school shall be downward and not upward. This is the first step. Perhaps there are sound reasons why it should not be taken, important interests that would thereby be endangered. If so, no doubt they will be ably and abundantly set forth.

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